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# Effects Of Eliminating The Cap On The Number of Participants in the Statewide Parental Choice Program

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EFFECTS OF ELIMINATING THE CAP ON THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN  
THE STATEWIDE PARENTAL CHOICE PROGRAM

Reginald L. Lawrence II

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

June 2016

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## ABSTRACT

Funding provided for public education is also being utilized for charter, private and /or parochial voucher schools across the state of Wisconsin. Policy was passed that eliminates current enrollment caps in the statewide parental choice program. In 2016-17, enrollment is limited to 1% of the district's school age population and increases by 1% annually until it reaches 10% then lifts entirely. In advocating against the proposed policy, three critical issues emerged – the cost of funding the additional program, the moral obligation to educate neediest students, and grading school performance. Policy recommendation includes, leave remaining enrollment cap in place, create a universal screener to grade schools, create a matrix to rank schools, and limit chartering agencies to public school boards. The results would be a policy that creates a fair and consistent way of educating all students and funding and grading all schools statewide regardless of their affiliation.

## PREFACE

The policy advocacy project has been the piece of the dissertation process that I hold closest to my heart. I have learned that there are so many factors that have to be taken into consideration when trying to implement what seems a simple task. The unintended outcomes that avail themselves in many cases far outweigh the intended ones. The moral imperative of education is what drives me to become an effective and active leader with respect to caring for others. Growing up in a family living in poverty challenged me and my sibling to realize the importance of education and use it to make life better for ourselves and our children. While neither of my parents completed college, they went to work every day and made sure that my sister and I received a good education; partly in public education and partly in private education.

I believe that the work on this project can be utilized to improve school districts across the state and beyond, if the tenets of fair and quality education for all are taken to heart. I am confident that as there continues to be battles for funding of all educational endeavors, regardless of school affiliation, then our students will have their educational needs met. My policy work has brought to the light some interesting points to ponder, yet I have come to a realization that in education, politics rule. If you side with the right group, you come out a winner, and with the wrong group, you remain a loser. For the sake of our children, let's hope that everyone becomes the right group to side with.

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my daughter, Kaela Kristina Lawrence. It is with my sincerest hopes that I have inspired you to always work hard and strive to be the best person you are humanly capable of being. Be a risk-taker, never settle for less, strive for excellence and above all remember, NOBODY loves you more than Big Poppa!



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## **CHAPTER ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

As an educator for the past 23 years in my current school district, I have remained an avid reader and practitioner of many research-based strategies that have evolved over time to improve academic instruction. I have also seen my public school district drastically decline in numbers from educating over 100,000 students to its' current enrollment of around 78,000 students. Throughout that time, public schools in my district have always co-existed along with charter, private and/or parochial voucher schools, competing for the same students that lived in our neighborhoods. With the majority of students once attending mostly public schools, state funding received for those students easily provided an abundance of money to maintain all school functions. As enrollment numbers in public schools began to decline, enrollment numbers in charter and voucher schools increased, meaning that public funds would be diverted from the public schools to support the charter and voucher schools.

This has led to my urgency in advocating against the latest charter/voucher school policy being implemented in Wisconsin. In his 2015-17 State of Wisconsin Executive Budget, Governor Scott Walker and the legislature have eliminated the cap on the number of participants in the Statewide Parental Choice Program over the course of the next decade (Walker, 2015). The potential increase of enrolled students coupled with another proposal to expand independent charter schools to more than 140 school districts across Wisconsin would lead to less funding for public school districts like mine. For this reason, I have paid close attention to the meetings taking place in Madison with members of the Senate so that I am aware of how my school district would be affected after the final meeting on the budget.

## Critical Issues

Since 2011, Republicans have been working to expand the independent charter school program across Wisconsin. In an article by Stein and Richards (2011), they shared that the budget panel backed expanding an independent charter school program to medium and large school districts around Wisconsin and approved the proposal that would largely apply to districts with more than 2,000 students in 2011. This serves as a prelude to one of many critical issues with the elimination of the charter school enrollment cap that is currently in place.

The major issue with eliminating the charter/voucher school enrollment cap is that there would be an increase in the amount of money needed to fund the program, which would be taken from the state funding received by public schools. The current per pupil voucher payment is \$7,210 annually for a K-8 student and \$7,856 annually for a high school student. Governor Walker's budget calls for dropping the enrollment cap on the two-year-old statewide program, which is now limited to 1,000 students. But he didn't clarify how to fund the expansion (Richards, 2015a). Richards (2015b) captures the effect of eliminating the cap by clarifying that the 1,000 student enrollment cap would increase to 1% of the student population of each district in 2016-17 then increase annually for 10 years, when the enrollment cap would be eliminated entirely. Richards (2015b) goes on to state that based on applications the state has already received for the statewide program this coming year, an additional 2,613 students would be eligible to participate. The state estimates it would cost \$18.4 million to fund the new voucher students and as a result, general aid to public school districts would be reduced to public schools while their expenses would remain the same.

As the critical issue of funding the program expansion continues to be the big issue, additional research claims an even bigger impact on public schools. Richards and Hahn (2015) state that payments for those pupils over the next two years would be paid for with about \$37 million from the state's general purpose fund, with payments fully offset by aid reductions to the pupils' districts of residence. Fiscal Analyst, Christa Pugh, of the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau goes a step further in sharing that although a long-term estimate of payments for incoming statewide choice program pupils is speculative at this time, total payments from 2015-16 to 2024-25 could range from an estimated \$600 million to an estimated \$800 million (Pugh, 2015).

Another critical issue that needs to be addressed is the moral obligation of politicians to make educational decisions that have an important impact on the lives of our neediest students and their families. According to Rouse (1997), when the Parental Choice Program began, it was meant to be a way of providing a better education for low-income families living in poverty and unable to afford a quality education. Arnesen, Arnold, Brien, Carstensen, Passman, and Silveira (2015) disagree with expanding voucher schools stating this is not about helping low-income children succeed academically or about "failing" schools. It's about sending public tax money to religious schools and for-profit private schools run by corporations, while reducing funds for public schools. The elimination of the enrollment cap and expansion of the program serves even less of the students it was intended for. Since the inception of the statewide voucher program two years ago, the majority of children who applied for vouchers were already attending private schools without public assistance (Richards & Hahn, 2015).

Therefore the beneficiaries of the vouchers (8 in 10 students) that were paying tuition, now receive an entitlement.—now an entitlement.

The last critical issue that needs to be addressed with the elimination of the enrollment cap and expansion of charter and voucher schools goes back to academic success of students in our schools and how to consistently rate them. In all of the proposals that are being discussed, not one of them shares a concrete plan for improving our schools. There continues to be differences in how schools would be graded as well as varying requirements that certain types of schools are held accountable for. In an article on expanding independent charter schools to more than 140 districts, Richards (2015c), paraphrases a Republican Senator in stating that for those districts that have schools that are struggling, charters offer a way to say to the community: This isn't working for us. We have a better idea to run a school. Yet no plans on how to better run the school are given. Opoien (2015) reiterates that poll after poll shows that Wisconsin opposes tax subsidies for unaccountable private schools. Report after report proves that public schools provide more opportunities and students at public schools perform better than those in voucher schools. With eliminating the cap and expanding the charter and voucher school program, this leads to the creation of other chartering organizations in which schools would not have to follow public school laws. The schools, which could be created in 146 districts, would get federal money, but wouldn't be controlled by any elected public body, as public schools are. Plus in Milwaukee, public schools could systemically be converted to "independent" choice schools that operate outside of any public scrutiny (Zweifel, 2015).

## **Policy Recommendation**

The policy that I am advocating for is one where we leave the enrollment caps for charter and voucher schools intact. Public schools are given the responsibility of educating all students in grades K-12 (low income, special education, gifted and talented) and are equipped with certified staff, school buildings and more financial resources than many of the much smaller charter and voucher schools. I am proposing that within individual school districts, no more charter and voucher schools be added to the program until a universal screener is created that would hold all schools accountable to the same measures. District school boards, the current governing body in public school systems, would have decision-making authority to move forward with this process. If schools receive state funding, then they would have to meet the same requirements of public schools or risk losing their funding.

I propose a policy that would limit the chartering of schools to public school boards, the recognized elected public officers within a school district. This would help create a consistent way of monitoring schools and holding them accountable. The school board of each individual school district would have the autonomy to rate school performance and both add and remove schools that are not meeting requirements. School boards would work in conjunction with the department of public instruction in implementing the process used to currently assess public schools as well. Funding would be used to improve performance in our existing schools, however, could be removed from low performing schools and pooled with another school that has better potential in improving academics for students. This could potentially provide additional resources to be used in our schools that need more or can provide additional services for students.

## **Effectiveness of Policy Recommendation**

At this current moment, while I feel that my proposed policy changes could have a major effect on improving education in Wisconsin, I do not feel that the policy would be well-received by charter and private school advocates. My policy would not allow for the privatization of education, meaning that outside organizations and for-profit groups would not have the ability to continuously create schools or receive access to the vast majority of funding and resources that would be available for public schools. My policy would limit non-public school organizations to serving as consultants and providers of school support as needed until all schools could be held accountable to the same academic performance standards. Access to the availability of financial resources earmarked for public education, which could be lucrative for businesses in the private sector, would be maintained for the primary purpose of funding public education.

I envision my policy would help the state to rebuild the infrastructure of public schools, where quality teaching is recognized and resources are readily available for all schools, including the charter and private sector. There would be ample resources available to provide support to improving failing schools and/or closing then utilizing funds to maintain added resources and provide sustainability with remaining schools. Funds would be used to educate and uplift all families and students that need it most.

## **CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED**

Five distinct disciplinary areas of need are shared regarding my proposed policy as it relates to the implications of eliminating the cap on the number of participants in the statewide parental choice program.

### **Educational Analysis**

There continues to be controversy about whether or not students perform better academically in public schools versus charter, private and /or parochial voucher schools. Charter schools are not the same as voucher schools, which are private schools that can teach biblical-based curriculum and receive taxpayer-funded tuition to educate their students. Independent charter schools are public schools run by nonprofit companies instead of school districts. They have to report all the same data as public schools but have additional flexibility from other state rules in exchange for meeting contract-based performance goals with a state-approved authorizing agency. Other charter schools in Milwaukee and parts of Wisconsin are typically run by school boards, employ district staff and therefore follow the same state-wide assessment requirements as public schools.

Currently, research shows that students attending public schools are outperforming their counterparts in charter, private, and voucher schools. According to Beck (2014), students attending private schools receiving taxpayer-funded vouchers in a new statewide program did not score as high overall as public school students on state tests in reading and math, according to data released by the Department of Public Instruction. Finkelmeyer (2012) concurs that Wisconsin kids enrolled in private school choice programs are not performing as well as their public school counterparts on standardized exams. My analysis of the current policy is that while public schools are



outperforming charter, private, and voucher schools, the Governor is continuing to not only decrease public school funding, but then allocate the funding to the expansion of these underperforming schools. In other words, money that should be used to fund public education is being used to expand charter, choice and voucher schools despite their lower academic performance.

### **Economic Analysis**

The responsibility of adequately funding public education relies heavily on the policies that are both created and implemented by the Governor. When the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) began in 1990, it was created to provide educational freedom and choice to low-income parents in Milwaukee that did not otherwise have the financial means to send their children to private schools. To qualify for MPCP in 1992, the family income had to be at or less than 175% of the federal poverty level or \$24,412 for a family of four (Mitchell, 1992). Today, there are three separate programs; Milwaukee, Racine, and a K-12 state-wide program. To qualify for the state-wide program, the family income must be at or less than 185% of the federal poverty level or \$45,263 for a family of four. The income limit in the Milwaukee and Racine programs is 300% of the federal poverty level or \$73,401 for a family of four (Johnson, 2016).

With the current charter school enrollment cap and qualifications for family income levels continuing to increase, it allows for more families, many with incomes above the poverty level, to receive funding for their children's education. In other words, the families that have a lower income have an even less chance to receive funding for their children's education, the main reason for which the program was created. For example, when the income level was lower, a family of 4 making up to \$24,412 had less

competition and therefore a better chance of receiving a school voucher for their educational purposes. However, with the current allowable income levels near \$73,401 for a family of 4, there is a much larger pool of families to qualify for the funding.

Another economic impact would be the financial strain that would be placed on public school districts as student enrollment numbers increase due to the elimination of the current enrollment cap. Beginning in the 2016-17 school year, each public school district in the state of Wisconsin would have to set aside charter school funding equivalent to 1% of the public school student population in the first year, with an annual 1% increase for 10 years. After 10 years, the enrollment cap would then be eliminated entirely (Richards, 2015b). This potential increase in student enrollment as well as the cost to fund their education would have an even bigger impact on smaller public school districts. For example, in the state-wide program, a school district of 5000 students would have to set aside charter school funding for 50 students in year 1, increasing to 500 students in year 10 at an estimated cost of \$3.6 million dollars. A school district of 75,000 students would have to set aside funding for 750 students in year 1, increasing to 7,500 students in year 10 at an estimated cost of \$54 million dollars.

The funding would be taken from the money allocated for public education and used for private, charter, and voucher education. Buddin (2012) takes this a step further by claiming that while most students are drawn from traditional public schools, charter schools are pulling large numbers of students from the private education market and present a potentially devastating impact on the private education market, as well as a serious increase in the financial burden on taxpayers.

## **Social Analysis**

Although there has been considerable public attention in comparing student achievement in charter and public schools, there has been less attention to the link between charter schools and increased segregation. Booker, Zimmer and Buddin (2005) state that studies in a number of different states and school districts in the U.S. show that charter schools often lead to increased school segregation. The current policy has the potential to increase the segregation of schools in a number of different factors. First, a sense of segregation occurs between those families attending public schools versus families attending charter, private and voucher schools. In public schools, some families tend to live in poverty coupled with lower student academic performance. Many of these families do not have the opportunity to send their students to higher performing schools due to tuition costs and academic qualifications. On the other hand, some families that attend charter, private, and voucher schools tend to be more knowledgeable of academic programs when selecting schools for their children and in some cases are more affluent and able to pay tuition. Reardon (2011) affirms that a policy that exacerbates existing levels of segregation should be a major concern, particularly in the current environment: a widening gap in student achievement between affluent and low-income students. This in turn, leads to the notion of segregation between the haves and the have-nots.

Another aspect of segregation occurs when we infuse religion as a factor in school selection. The current policy (e.g., eliminating the cap on the number of participants in the state-wide parental choice program) allows for an increase in families enrolling their children in private schools equal to 1% of the public school student population and receiving vouchers to pay the cost. The funding for the vouchers is taken directly from

the funds allocated for public school education. So as the opportunities to enroll students in private schools increases, the cost of educating the students increases while funds available for public schools decreases. As this process continues over the next 10 years, the public and private school environments would become more segregated based on religion. Eckes, Fox, and Buchanan (2011) concur that perhaps less visible, but clearly growing, are charter schools that target specific religious and cultural groups. They further claim that such niche schools often result in the segregation of students by religion or by social values—a trend that would almost inevitably lead to a public school system that is increasingly fragmented.

### **Political Analysis**

It is my personal belief that public school proponents, who tend to hold democratic values, feel very strongly that public education is under attack. In agreement with my assumption, Kahlenberg (2004) states that common school advocates fundamentally believe in public education as more accountable than private education and as more likely to instill democratic values. The democratic values being referred to were those in support of the traditional, neighborhood schools that maintained the responsibility of educating our students and received public school dollars. Over the past few years, there have been large cuts in public school funding along with reallocating funds to pay for families that attend charter, private, and voucher schools. This has led to some democrats taking on the role of educational reform through the support of privatization. Kirkpatrick (1995) denotes an approved proposal in 1990-91 by Rep. Annette "Polly" Williams for students in the Milwaukee Public School District which led to students receiving government-funded tuition vouchers in 1993-94 to attend any one of

a dozen non-religious private schools in that city. The privatization of public education, similarly to charter and voucher schools, would have a devastating, long-lasting effect on traditional public school districts and their ability to adequately educate its students. Less funding would lead to fewer resources; fewer program offerings; fewer teachers; larger class sizes; and eventually low student enrollment.

On the contrary, I believe that proponents for charter, private, and voucher schools, who tend to hold republican values but as aforementioned can be democrats with support for privatization, may support the actions of increasing opportunities for parental school choice. Usher and Kober (2011) assert that with republicans controlling a majority of state houses and the U.S. House of Representatives, interest in school vouchers has spiked during the past year at the federal, state, and local levels. This implies that parents would have the ability to send their children to any type of school of their choice regardless of its location, and/or charter, private or religious affiliation. The cost of attending those schools would be taken directly from funding allocated for public schools. The current Republican/Democratic make up within the state has led to somewhat of a power struggle where most educational decisions have gone along party lines (e.g., republicans voting for republican issues and democrats voting for democratic issues).

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

The goal of creating charter, private, and voucher school programs was to even the playing field by providing opportunities for families living in poverty and children attending low performing public schools to attend private schools for a better education. This moral imperative of education is not being met with the current policy in place.

Many of the families of four that once earned incomes of \$22,000 per year are now being challenged for enrollment seats by families of four that have an income in excess of \$73,000 per year. Adding to this disparity is the ability for families to receive a public school-funded voucher that would allow them to pay for their children to attend religious schools. What this means is that the students of new families that are now eligible to receive voucher payments for education in essence are not new students to the program. For example, a family that once paid tuition out of pocket to send their child to a school of their choice can now receive a public school-funded voucher to pay the tuition instead.

In a moral sense, there is less of an opportunity for families of low poverty with children attending low performing schools to benefit from the intended purpose of receiving a voucher. The available enrollment seats are being taken by more affluent families with higher family incomes and children already enrolled in private schools. In a study on the twenty year existence of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), Price and Wittkopf (2014) concur that the reality is private subsidy monies, the taxpayer supported stipend, are primarily going to students who already attend private schools. And competition is not occurring, nor is it resulting in any substantive change to the overall working conditions of parents and families still reeling from decades of neglect and the recent economic recession. Ethically speaking with regards to eliminating the charter school enrollment cap, it does not seem fair that the state continues to increase funding of charter, private, and voucher schools through the use of funds designated for public education. It is even more unethical when the assessment data shows that charter, private, and voucher schools are performing at a lower rate than public schools (Finkelmeier, 2012; Beck, 2014).

### **CHAPTER THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

The goal of my policy is advocating for a way to provide a fair assessment and funding process for charter, private, and public schools in the state of Wisconsin as well as limiting the chartering of schools to public school boards. It calls for leaving the current enrollment caps for charter, private, and voucher schools intact and not adding any new schools to the state-wide program until a universal measure is created that would hold all schools equally accountable. If any schools received state funding, then they would all have to meet the same requirements regardless of affiliation or risk losing access to federal funding.

Schools receiving federal funding would be assessed by a state report card which gives schools and districts an overall accountability score and rating of performance and an operational ranking grade. The document would be similar to the previous Wisconsin state report card; analyzing student academic growth, school gap closure, on-track and post-secondary readiness. Student engagement indicators however would differ by comparing student achievement at the district, state, and national level. Schools would also receive an operational ranking based on the criteria of building adequacy, school enrollment factors, and school program offerings. Building adequacy refers to the operational functions of a school site (e.g., age of building, building efficiency, and wheel-chair accessibility). School enrollment factors consist of reviewing a schools' enrollment capacity, 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday state enrollment student count, and 3 year school enrollment trend. The third component in building adequacy refers to the type of academic and extracurricular programs that are offered at each school. This information would be used as a process for identifying schools to be considered for closure. By

analyzing the state report card data and the operational ranking grade, an in-depth snapshot of each school across the state would be created.

Public school boards are the recognized elected public officers within a school district and have had the responsibility and authority of governing school policy as well as creating and closing schools within the district. Therefore the school board of each school district would continue to remain in that capacity along with being the district chartering agency. Each school board would add a charter school director position to provide experience and clarity as it relates to charter school processes. The school board would have autonomy over all schools and school functions within the district regardless of a school's affiliation.

This policy will meet the needs, values, and preferences of students, parents, and school districts across the state. Students, whether they currently live in poverty and attend low-performing schools or attend private, religious schools, will now have a greater opportunity to apply for seats that are available in schools with higher academic performance and better available resources. Those students living in poverty will have less competition in obtaining the limited seats that become available each year. With all schools being monitored and rated equally by academic performance and building adequacy, schools would be forced to become facilities of higher learning. When students are given a high quality education, they are more capable of reaching their academic potential through continuing education and eventually becoming successful citizens with productive careers in their community.

Parents will have their needs, values, and preferences met by being made more aware of the performance and resources available within the schools that their children



will be attending. Parents that meet the required family income levels will have a better opportunity to receive funding that will allow them to send their children to the schools of their choice due to less competition for available funding.

School districts will have their needs, values, and preferences met by having more fiscal control over funding provided for education. They will have the ability to accurately monitor and control school enrollment within their individual districts while allocating school resources to schools in a more equitable fashion. School academic and operational ratings will contribute to districts being more proactive in improving academic achievement and providing additional program offerings. This in turn will help school districts in attracting potential families and possibly increasing school enrollment. The performance of school districts will be a determining factor on funding and resources provided for the future.

I believe this policy is one that is appropriate for education and realistic in being implemented across the state. The goals and objectives are validated by the current policies that are being implemented with respect to the funding of charter, private, and public schools. This policy recognized the importance to provide an equitable way of funding schools in each school district regardless of their affiliation, providing educational opportunities for our neediest students, those living in poverty and attending low-performing schools, and holding schools accountable in becoming institutions of higher learning. If this policy is implemented, district school boards will have the autonomy to govern schools while the potential for party-line politics is lessened because decisions are made for improving all schools for all students.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT**

In creating this policy advocacy document, I have come to learn that while all policies may have an intended purpose, there is also an unintended result that comes to light. My policy stands as an argument against eliminating the cap on the number of participants in the statewide parental choice program. The effects of this decision would have an impact on not only charter and private school education, but public school education and the field of education as a whole. According to Littky and Grabelle (2004), the real goals of education are to create individuals who can:

- be lifelong learners
- be passionate
- be ready to take risks
- be able to problem-solve and think critically
- be able to look at things differently
- be able to work independently and with others
- be creative
- care and want to give back to their community
- persevere
- have integrity and self-respect
- have moral courage
- be able to use the world around them well
- speak well, write well, read well, and work well with numbers
- truly enjoy their life and their work.

There is no mention of what type of schools will better prepare students to meet these goals, however the pros and cons of my advocated policy must be considered.

### **Pros**

The pros of my policy, which is to keep the state-wide charter school enrollment cap in place, would have a positive effect in several areas. First, it would help to eliminate defunding of public education to fund charter and private school education. As the charter school enrollment numbers increase, funds needed to pay for the expansion would be taken from the funds that are available for public education. With keeping the cap in place, public schools would be able to maintain their current budgets without fear of losing additional funds. This would allow public schools the ability to utilize their funds for the benefit of students enrolled in public schools. Currently, public schools can levy property taxes to make up for a portion of funds lost to funding voucher schools, but only up to the amount of the per pupil payment. While this results in the districts not being able to receive funding up to their revenue limits, my policy would limit the additional loss of funding that would occur with the expansion.

Another pro of my policy is that it would give school districts the ability to fairly rate school academic and operational performance. Currently public, charter and private schools do not have to administer the same academic assessments or share the data collected as criteria to receive state funding. My policy would clearly state that in order for schools to receive public school funds they must adhere to the same criteria. For example, all schools would receive a state report card which gives an overall accountability score and rating. Schools would receive ratings based on student academic achievement data, truancy and attendance data, and overall building adequacy data. If a

school, whether it is public, charter, or private refuses to follow the prescribed criteria, then they would not be eligible to receive state funding. This in essence would hold all schools accountable to the same criteria regardless of their affiliation.

Additionally, my policy would bring a sense of consistency with how all schools monitor policy and operation. Currently, public school boards govern the actions of all public schools within their district. However, independent charter and private schools are not governed by school boards, but instead are governed by a chartering agency. For example, there could be an individual chartering agency for each separate charter and private school within a school district. This would cause a large amount of disparity and lack of consistency in how each school is operated. My proposed policy would allow all schools within a school district, including charter and private schools, to fall under the autonomy of the district school board. This would ensure that all schools within a district are operating under the same policies, guidelines, and procedures.

Lastly, my policy would address the moral and ethical obligations of meeting the academic needs of all students by providing parents with an opportunity to make more informed educational decisions. Parental choice has often been linked to important educational decisions. In referring to vouchers, Price (2007) asserts that school choice has little to do with religion, wisdom, knowledge, or truth. But it does have something to do with faith in the free market and declining faith in public education. My policy would begin to restore faith in public education by helping parents make informed decisions. As schools improve in their quality of instruction, based on the state report card and building adequacy ratings created through my policy, families living in poverty and children

attending low performing public schools would have an opportunity to attend higher performing schools regardless of affiliation.

Lower performing schools would have to make improvements or risk losing funding or being closed. Charter and voucher schools would have to meet requirements or risk not receiving public funding. Schools would have to make legitimate choices on sharing required data and meeting the same accountability requirements as other public, charter, and private schools. Parents would be inclined to make choices based on educational factors rather than arbitrary wants and needs.

### **Cons**

One con regarding my policy is that it would limit the expansion of charter and private schools within the state. With the statewide charter cap staying intact, there would be no new students enrolling in the program as well as no new schools being allowed to join as members in the statewide program. According to Richards (2015b), based on applications already received for the upcoming school year, an additional 2,613 students would be eligible to participate, where 8 in 10 of those students are already attending a private school. The state estimates it would cost an additional \$18.4 million to fund the new voucher students. This would be viewed as a con to my policy because charter and private school advocates would perceive that their opportunities to parental choice in selecting educational programs for their children would be reduced or eliminated. On a moral and ethical note, families with strict religious beliefs would possibly feel that they are being denied access to schools that best support their faith. This in turn could lead to families choosing not to send their children to other schools in their district as well as

deciding to move out of district and/or state. If this occurs, school enrollment and school funding could be negatively affected.

Another con regarding this policy is the potential loss of funding that would occur to public, charter, and private schools based on their overall accountability score and rating. If schools are rated low based on my proposed criteria, they risk losing their state funding along with the possibility of school closure. This would be viewed negatively by both public and charter school advocates because with my policy all schools would be held accountable to the same policies, guidelines, and procedures. For example, schools that may have been consistently low performing now risk losing future funding and potentially closing. In the past, many low performing schools continued to receive state funding despite their school performance.

In sum, there are pros and cons to holding public, charter, and voucher schools to the same accountability standards in providing a quality education for all students. Funding would be provided to schools that meet the state report card and building adequacy requirements regardless of their school affiliation, which would mean that some schools would gain funding and others would lose it. With respect to the moral and ethical obligations of educating students, although schools would provide high quality education for students, it is possible that some students may not have their needs met due to their religious faith and beliefs. Therefore, this policy would continue to have proponents and critics alike.

## CHAPTER FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

My policy is one that would be implemented at the state level as it would have a major impact on all school districts across Wisconsin. Stakeholders, such as the Republican and Democratic leaders across the state would discuss the impact of the proposed policy and provide recommendations to the Governor of Wisconsin before a final decision would be made to adopt the policy implementation plan.

### **School District Requirements**

As the statewide parental choice enrollment cap would remain intact, school districts would be responsible for submitting specific criteria requested by the state that would be reflected in a rating based on each school's statewide report card and building adequacy ratings.

**State-wide report card.** For the state-wide report card rating, schools would be required to submit assessment data from the Star 360 assessment, state-wide assessment, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (See Appendix A for a copy of the state-wide report card summary).

The STAR 360 assessment, a formative, on-line assessment that is taken by students in grades K-12, would be administered 3 times a year and measures student performance in early literacy, reading, and mathematics throughout the school year. This particular assessment calibrates the level of questioning to the students instructional level. For example, when a student answers a question correctly, the test calibrates to a more difficult following question. If the student answers the next question incorrectly, the test would then recalibrate to a less difficult question, not lower than the previous one. The benefit of this assessment is that it would provide an accurate, real-time picture of where

a student is performing at grade level. It would allow educators to screen and group students for targeted instruction, measure student growth, predict performance on state-wide exams, and monitor achievement on common core state standards. The ultimate benefit would be that students attending public, charter, and voucher schools would receive the same assessments, which would imply that all schools were teaching to the grade level standards and therefore receiving the same quality education.

At the state level, public, charter, and private schools would administer annually, a summative assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (i.e., Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), Smarter Balance Assessment, etc.) for grade levels 3-11. This state-wide assessment would be administered in the spring to compare end-of-the-year student performance across the state in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies.

To triangulate assessment data, public, charter, and private schools would administer a third assessment, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This assessment would be administered every other year to students in grades 4, 8, and 12 in reading and mathematics and is recognized as the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas (Grigg, Donahue, and Dion, 2007).

The assessment data would be used to analyze student academic growth, school gap closure, and on-track and post-secondary academic readiness, which refers to graduation rate and attendance rate. From this data, schools would receive an overall accountability score and rating of performance. The rating and scores are the following:

- Significantly Exceeds Expectations – Scores between 83-100



- Exceeds Expectations -- Scores between 73-82.9
- Meets Expectations -- Scores between 63-72.9
- Meets Few Expectations Scores between 53-62.9
- Fails to Meet Expectations Scores between 0-52.9

Student engagement indicators, which include test participation rate, absenteeism rate and dropout rate, are also a determinant which affects the overall accountability score and rating,

**Building adequacy rating.** Schools would receive an operational ranking based on the criteria of building adequacy, which refers to the following areas: school operational functions, school enrollment factors, and school program offerings. The operational functions of a school site (e.g., age of building, building efficiency, and wheel-chair accessibility) would be assessed yearly by the Chief of Facilities and Maintenance in each school district. A report of condition and compliance, with ratings of Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor, would be submitted to the state for verification and future audit visits. School enrollment factors consist of reviewing a schools' enrollment capacity, 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday state enrollment student count, and 3 year school enrollment trend. The Chief of Parent and Student Services in each school district would collect and submit trend data (e.g., above expectations, consistent with very little change, below expectations) annually to the state by the recognized 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in September.

The third component in building adequacy refers to the type of academic and extracurricular programs that are offered at each school. Schools would receive favorable ratings for offering programs for students such as gifted and talented programs, foreign languages, services for English language learners, before and afterschool services for

students and families. Schools that are not able to provide additional programming that would benefit students and families would be reason for review. This would lead to conversations around adequacy, efficiency and effectiveness of current programming. If schools are able to offer only the bare minimums of academic classes without any additional program offerings, that would be reason for more focused review of the school. The Chief of Curriculum & Instruction would collect this data and rate the programs on overall results, then submit a report of findings to the state level for analysis. By analyzing the data collected and reported at the state level, an in-depth snapshot of each school across the state would be created and would be used as a process for identifying schools to be considered for loss of funding and possible closure.

### **School Board Requirements**

As my policy would include the school board as the governing office with autonomy over all school decision-making within a school district, the school board would have the responsibility of appointing a charter school director position. This position would be an educator experienced in charter and private school policy, operation, and oversight and would serve as a decision-making party with respect to all schools, but more importantly charter and private schools. Peifer (2014) states boards of education are uniquely positioned to provide leadership for exploring differences of education stakeholders, including students, teachers, families, and community members, working with the community to find its shared ideals, and crafting a shared mission and vision for its schools that reflects their community. For that reason, the charter school director position would be important in setting the precedent that school districts are inclusive of all schools. When the opportunity to rate and select schools that may

possibly lose funding or risk closure, charter schools that fall in this category would have the expertise of the charter school director to lead the conversation around strengths and weaknesses with the school board members. When additional funds are available to either reallocate to schools experiencing academic success or potentially creating a new school, the charter school director would add rich conversation and guidance as a school board member. The school board would have the responsibility of working in concert with the district superintendent to make decisions that are best for their individual school districts and the charter school director position would play an equal part in making decisions at the district level.

### **Communication**

In July of the upcoming school year, school district superintendents would receive a state report which shares the overall accountability score and rating from the state report card and a building adequacy rating for the entire school district as well as each individual school within the district. The Chief of Assessment in each school district would send the reports to the schools both via electronic document and paper copy document through the mail. School teams would have the opportunity to review the school data prior to the start of the school year and work on implementing strategies that led to areas of success. Schools that received a rating of Fails to Meet Expectations would be notified by the state of their low performance and would require completion of an implementation plan to address the noted areas of failure. The Chief of Assessment would meet with those schools to review their implementation plans before submitting them to the state. Throughout the school year, each individual school district would be responsible for progress monitoring the school implementation plans. In addition, school

districts would continue to follow many of the current practices used in providing information to the state such as the implementation of yearly assessment calendars, directions regarding collection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday enrollment counts for school funding, and submitting end-of-year school-wide assessment data.

In the month of July, following the end of the current school year, schools would receive their state report card and building adequacy ratings. At this time, district-level review of school implementation plans would take place to see if schools were making improvements towards meeting district and state expectations. My policy would monitor school ratings every 5 years for the purpose of determining schools in danger of losing funding or possibly moving to closure. Schools consistently meeting expectations in their ratings would continue to receive state funding commensurate with their student enrollment. Schools that fail to meet expectations would be monitored each year where 3 consecutive years of failed ratings would lead to a probationary status for the remaining 2 years of the 5 year process. Failure to meet expectations after probation would lead to potentially losing funds and/or closure which would be determined at the state level. School districts and school boards upon receiving information about schools that are in danger of losing funding would begin the arduous task of creating next steps to include how schools would continue to be supported financially at the district level or if the school should be closed. This process would require the school superintendent, school board and community stakeholders such as (administration, staff, parents, and community members), to have forums where the details from the state can be discussed in-depth. The school board and superintendent would ultimately have the final decision to be reported back to the state.

## CHAPTER SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

To monitor the progress and implementation of my policy, feedback from several groups of stakeholders as well as the analysis of data would be considered.

Ultimately, the Governor, who signs the final decisions on public policy along with the legislature per approval of the biennium budget, would have to work with statewide politicians in reviewing the effects of keeping the statewide charter enrollment cap in place. Assessment would revolve around reviewing the individual school district performance and rating on the various components that make up the statewide report card and building adequacy ratings. It is my expectation assessment would revolve around reviewing that as all public, charter, and private schools are being held to the same accountability standards, educational conversations would become more focused on school performance towards providing quality education for all students rather than the type of school affiliation. Currently, educational policies are created to specifically support either public, charter, and/or voucher schools when it is my belief that a policy created to support education should be written for all schools without reference to being public, charter, or voucher. Schools making positive gains would have access to state funding and opportunities for expansion, while schools with continuous low performance would risk losing funds and possibly closure. Funds would then be used to provide resources and support to remaining schools as well as creating opportunities for creating new schools.

The State Superintendent of Education would hold the responsibility of monitoring the data shared from the statewide report card ratings and communicating results to all school districts while tiering schools based on levels of effectiveness. During

an annual state of the schools address, each superintendent would have the opportunity to review results and provide feedback to the State Superintendent. This information would be reviewed and compiled in a report to include next steps at the state level and district level. Based on expectations met, school districts would be afforded the opportunity to continue with current processes or be placed on probation with sanctions to include losing funding or possible closure.

School districts working closely with their respective school boards would complete an end of year survey regarding the effectiveness of their efforts on the school report card and next steps that would be taken to either maintain exceptional performance or address academic inadequacies. This information would be reviewed at the state level then shared with district superintendents at a yearly statewide educational summit.

To include feedback from parents of children attending schools within the various school districts, I would recommend a parent advisory committee in each district. This group would have regular meetings with their respective school superintendents and be charged with providing feedback on their satisfaction with overall school performance and sharing their thoughts and opinions regarding professional development and the future direction of the district. Parent representatives would attend a summit with the State Superintendent to share their findings as well as provide feedback regarding school performance.

By keeping the current statewide parental choice enrollment cap in place and holding all schools to the same accountability standards, whether public, charter, or private, schools will have the opportunity to be rated equally on school performance and receive state funding to continue all academic endeavors. By monitoring the progress of

each school with statewide ratings, compiling of district survey data, and continuous summits with parents, school board members, superintendents, and state representatives; it is my hope that future recommendations to fund and expand educational offerings in our schools will be based on school performance rather than affiliation. It is also my hope that the neediest families in school districts are given the consideration and opportunity to receive a quality education for their children.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The impact of eliminating the enrollment cap on the number of participants in the statewide parental choice program would have a long-lasting effect on funding educational initiatives within all school districts while not meeting the true purpose of schools; to provide a quality education for all students.

Although this policy's main focus is on keeping the enrollment cap on the statewide parental choice program intact, the policy at the same time begins to address the accountability of academic performance in all schools regardless of their affiliation. It provides a level of consistency in how schools are rated based on their state report card and building adequacy ratings. What makes this an appropriate policy is that the integrity of decision-making for all school districts is kept intact. With the inclusion of a charter school director position, leadership and oversight with respect to charter and private schools would be provided.

The values of all students (e.g., public, charter, private) are at the center of this policy. This policy fulfills the intent of ensuring that all students would attend a school that provides quality education. Furthermore, this policy begins to address the adequacy in funding schools based on their yearly academic performance regardless of their school affiliation. For example, all schools that meet the expected requirements would continue to receive state funding for educational purposes. Schools that consistently perform below required standards risk losing funding and possibly closure.

The implementation of this policy is aligned to my vision of rebuilding the infrastructure of all schools, including public, charter and private sectors. By keeping the enrollment cap on the statewide parental choice program intact, it would allow time to



begin holding all schools to the same level of accountability before decisions are made on allocating funds. In terms of meeting the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, this policy would allow for parents, school board members, superintendents, and state representatives to engage in all levels of school-based decision-making. Furthermore, all stakeholders would attend yearly educational summits where they would create action plans to take back to their districts for implementation. For example, if a school district were not meeting expectations in the area of mathematics, stakeholders would attend the statewide summit to engage in conversation with other districts around steps to improve mathematics. Conversations would lead to the development of an action plan that could be taken back to their respective districts for implementation.

It is my hope that this policy would lead to funding schools and expanding educational offerings for all schools based on school performance rather than school affiliation. More importantly, it would lead to funding charter and private schools, not at the expense of public schools.

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# Appendix A

## STATE-WIDE REPORT CARD SUMMARY

School District: \_\_\_\_\_  
District Report Card Summary (year) \_\_\_\_\_

### Overall Accountability Score and Rating



**Fails to Meet  
Expectations**

Overall Accountability Ratings	Score
Significantly Exceeds Expectations	83-100
Exceeds Expectations	73-82.9
Meets Expectations	63-72.9
Meets Few Expectations	53-62.9
Fails to Meet Expectations	0-52.9

### Priority Areas

#### Student Achievement

Reading Achievement  
Mathematics Achievement

#### Student Growth

Reading Growth  
Mathematics Growth

#### Closing Gaps

Reading Achievement Gaps  
Mathematics Achievement Gaps  
Graduation Rate Gaps

#### On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness

Graduation Rate  
Attendance Rate  
3rd Grade Reading Achievement  
8th Grade Mathematics Achievement  
ACT Participation and Performance

ACT Score    State Score    NAEP Score

### Student Engagement Indicators

Test Participation Lowest Group Rate (goal  $\geq 95\%$ )  
Absenteeism Rate (goal  $< 13\%$ )  
Dropout Rate (goal  $< 6\%$ )

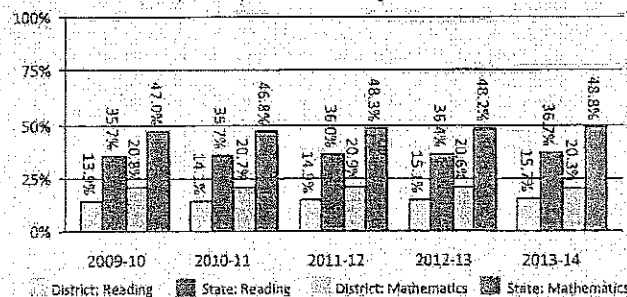
### Total Deductions:

Goal met: no deduction  
Goal not met:  
Goal met: no deduction

### District Information

Grades	K3-12
Locale	City
Enrollment	78,516
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian, or Alaska Native	0.8%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5.7%
Black not Hispanic	55.7%
Hispanic	24.1%
White not Hispanic	13.7%
Student Groups	
Students with Disabilities	20.6%
Economically Disadvantaged	82.7%
Limited English Proficient	9.5%

Wisconsin Student Assessment System Percent Proficient and Advanced  
Includes Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) and Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities (WAA-SwD). WKCE college and career readiness benchmarks based on National Assessment of Educational Progress.  
State proficiency rate is for all tested grades 3-8 and 10



Notes: Overall Accountability Score is an average of Priority Area Scores, minus Student Engagement Indicator deductions. The average is weighted differently for districts that cannot be measured with all Priority Area Scores, to ensure that the Overall Accountability Score can be compared fairly for all districts. Accountability Ratings do not apply to Priority Area Scores. Details can be found at <http://reportcards.dpi.wi.gov/>.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction | [dpi.wi.gov](http://dpi.wi.gov)

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1

### Priority Areas

- **Student Achievement** measures the level of knowledge and skills among students in the district, compared to state and national standards. It includes a composite of reading and mathematics performance by the "all students" group in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) for all tested grades in the district.
- **Student Growth** describes how much student knowledge of reading and mathematics in the school changes from year to year. It uses a point system that gives positive credit for students progressing toward higher performance levels, and negative credit for students declining below proficiency.
- **Closing Gaps** provides a measure that reflects the statewide goal of having all students improve, while narrowing the achievement and graduation gaps between groups of students. This measure acknowledges districts that raise the performance of traditionally lagging student groups, contributing to the closure of statewide gaps.
- **On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness** indicates the success of students in the district in achieving educational milestones that predict postsecondary success. It includes the graduation rate and the attendance rate, as applicable to the district. It also includes measures of third-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics achievement, and ACT participation and performance, as applicable to the district.

### Student Engagement Indicators

Student Engagement Indicators are measures outside the four Priority Areas that affect student success or the soundness of the report card. Each indicator has a goal, and districts that fail to meet that goal receive a point deduction from their Overall Accountability Score. Goals were set by looking at statewide data and establishing thresholds that identify districts contributing the most to lowering Wisconsin's overall performance in the areas below.

- **Test Participation Rate:** Every district has a goal of 95% participation in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS). The district's performance is measured by the participation rate of the lowest-participating student group. If this rate is less than 95%, but at least 85%, five points are deducted from the district's overall score; if this rate is less than 85%, 10 points are deducted.
- **Absenteeism Rate:** This indicator describes the proportion of students in the district who attend school less than 84.1% of the time. If the absenteeism rate in the district is 13% or more, five points are deducted. The absenteeism rate is different from the attendance rate because it measures students who are absent from school a certain amount of time, not how often students are present in school.
- **Dropout Rate:** The goal for all districts is to have a dropout rate of less than 6%. A district not meeting the goal has five points deducted from its score. Note that dropout rate is not the opposite of graduation rate. A dropout rate includes any student who leaves school in grades 7-12 without expecting to earn a high school diploma, while a graduation rate counts students who earn a high school diploma within a certain time (four or six years) after starting ninth grade.

### Notes on this District Report Card

- The data presented in this report card are for public, state, and federal accountability purposes.
- Student performance on the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) is the foundation of this report. WSAS data include results for both the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) and the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities (WAA-SwD).
- Starting in 2011-12, districts are held to a higher college and career readiness proficiency benchmark by aligning the cut scores of the WKCE to those of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). These higher cut scores have been retroactively applied to show trends. The higher cut scores only apply to WKCE Reading and Mathematics scores, not the WAA-SwD, at this time.
- Some supplemental data that are not used for accountability calculations are presented in this report card for informational purposes in order to provide context. Additional data on student performance are available here: <http://wisconsin.dpi.wi.gov/>.
- To protect student privacy, data for groups of fewer than 20 students are replaced by asterisks on public report cards.
- NA is used when data are Not Applicable. For example, a district that does not graduate students will have NA listed for graduation results. The analytical processes used in this report card are described in the Technical Guide and Interpretive Guide: <http://reportcards.dpi.wi.gov/>.
- State comparison scores shown on page 1 are shown for context only. They are not used to determine this district's score or rating.